

## Play entertains, but doesn't wow

BY JOHN O'BRIEN  
Staff Reviewer

The pounding beat of Irish folk music will fill the James G. Severns Theatre from Wednesday through Saturday as the Truman theatre department brings another production, "Dancing at Lughnasa," to the stage.

Written in 1990 by Brian Friel, "Dancing at Lughnasa" depicts the love, struggles and events taking place among the Mundy sisters in their small cottage in Ireland's Donegal County. The play is told from the perspective of Michael Evans, the nephew of the sisters. It recounts the summer of 1936 when Friar Jack, brother to the Mundy sisters, returns from a leper colony in Uganda sick with malaria. A radio nicknamed "Marconi" is brought into the house during that summer, filling the poor, disheveled home with laughter, dancing and happiness.

Doing the theatre department justice for the most part, this production brings honesty and life to Friel's script. The relationships between the sisters prove to be the most sincere aspect of the show, as the ensemble of five works together with believable chemistry and connection. Each member of the sister ensemble creates a memorable character. The cast members play off each other well, increasing the show's energy and bringing depth to the relationships between characters.

Working with a script that seems to live and breathe off sincerity, there are several scenes that lack the true honesty called for. This makes the scenes seem out of place and potentially causes the audience members to lose focus. Although these insincere moments are few and far between, another problem distracts from the production: accents. During the dress rehearsal Monday night, some actors seemed to have more difficulty than others when it came to tackling the Irish accent. Slipping from the accent was no rarity for many characters, but, like the occasional moments of insincerity, this served as a slight distraction.

The strongest actors in the

production were seniors Amber Collins, Elizabeth Necka and Michael McIntire. Taking command of the stage, Collins, as Maggie Mundy, and Necka, as Kate Mundy, had an incomparable stage presence and both bring emotion and life to the production. Sporting one of the strongest accents and the most commanding personality, Collins is to thank for much of the show's energy and humor. From rattling off riddles to bellowing songs and breaking into dance, Collins took the stage by storm. Commanding the stage in a less humorous and in a more mild manner, Necka accurately portrayed the fiercely devout Catholic schoolteacher Kate, sporting the greatest emotional contrast in the production and one of the most in-depth and sincere characters.

Starting and ending the production on powerful notes with wonderfully presented monologues, McIntire gave a memorable performance. He managed to portray his 7-year-old character with sincerity and skill. With the exception of a few confusing character traits in some characters, the remainder of the cast, namely sophomore Paige Hackworth as Agnes and senior Kelsey Weinrich as Christina, created memorable and in-depth characters. Hackworth and Weinrich's subtle actions and attention to details made their characters believable and powerful.

From placing the action and creating a memory-like feeling to filling the small cottage with the Irish music the Mundy sisters know and love, the technical aspects contributed greatly to the production. The set designed by senior Arthur Virnig accurately represented an Irish cottage in the late 1930s, showing both the simplicity and complexity of the poor household. The lighting design by senior Ronnie Rybkowski also was notable. From the simple and accurate window pane projection to the red glow enveloping Michael's memories, the lighting helped pull the show together and allowed the audience to differentiate between the past and present. The most essential and effective technical aspect, the sound design by



Above, senior Kelsey Weinrich, sophomore Paige Hackworth, senior Liz Necka and sophomore Joanne Heggemann play sisters in 1930s Ireland. Below, Heggemann and senior Amber Collins perform everyday tasks with attention to detail that helps to create sincere and believable characters.

senior Casey Scoggins accurately created the tone and pumped the theatre full of toe-tapping, Irish-jig-inducing music. On cue, the

music added further emotion and energy to the show.

Equipped with sincerity, contrasting emotions and toe-

tapping music, the production of "Dancing at Lughnasa" is well worth the audience's time and trip to Ophelia Parrish.

## 'Gnomeo' lacks Disney magic

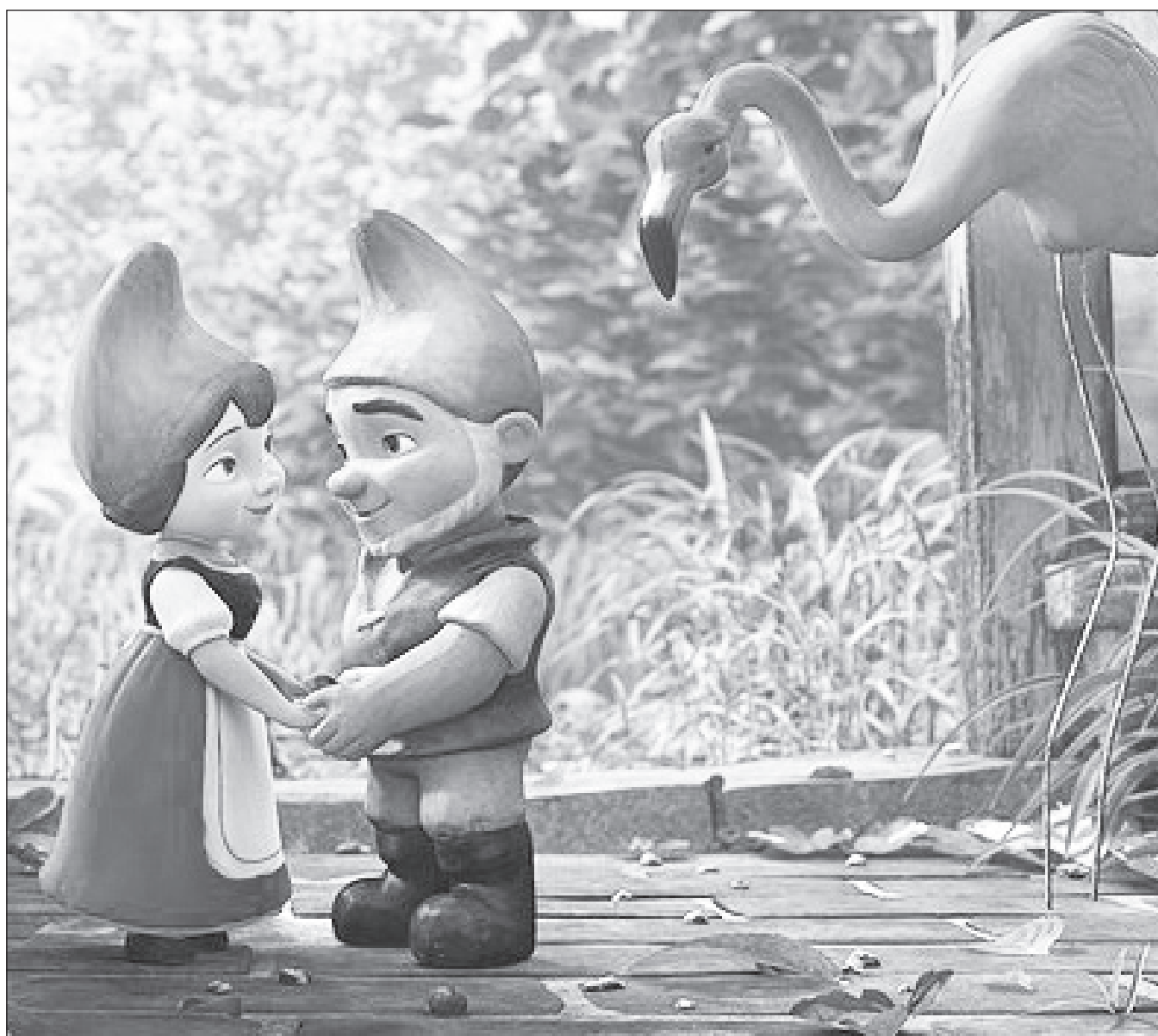


BY KEN DUSOLD  
Staff Reviewer

William Shakespeare's famous play of forbidden love is widely regarded as one of the most performed and adapted stories of all time. From the cringe-worthy — Baz Luhrmann's contrived "Romeo + Juliet" and Disney's "High School Musical" — to the applauded — Franco Zeffirelli's classic 1968 version and Robert Wise's "West Side Story" — audiences have watched Juliet swoon for her Romeo despite fierce objections from family, friends or society in dozens of films. Hollywood finally has set the famous story to animation, only to release a product that is all-around unsatisfying.

Walt Disney Studios joins forces with producers Elton John — yes, that Elton John — and Bernie Taupin for "Gnomeo and Juliet," which introduces us to the goings-on in our backyards when we are not looking. If the idea of your otherwise inanimate objects coming to life sounds familiar, it probably is because you have "Toy Story 3" or one of its predecessors in your DVD player. While this is a creative take on Shakespeare, Disney loses credit for swiping a well-used and beloved plot concept from its own vault.

The film's primary characters are from neighboring yards in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England. The Montague and Capulet names are attached to the



Juliet (voiced by Emily Blunt) and Gnomeo (voiced by James McAvoy) are star-crossed lovers in this front yard remake of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet."

homeowners, while the gnomes are differentiated by their hat colors: blue for Gnomeo's clan and red for Juliet's. The deep-seeded hatred between the gnome clans is derived from the homeowners' disgust with one another. While not absolutely needed to tell the story of the lovers, the cause for the disgust between the humans is never explained nor resolved, leaving the au-

dience left to just "go along" with the plot. With eight screenwriters and a running time of only 90 minutes, the disagreement could have been handled better.

The writers also made a mistake of choosing to have the gnomes speaking in modern English, with a few lines from the actual play thrown in as a garnish. This method of slipping 16th century phrases into

an animated movie set in the 21st century makes the words of Shakespeare sound cheesy. This is an accomplishment most writers would prefer not to have attributed to them.

With that said, the attempts to pay reference to numerous Shakespeare plays throughout the movie are adorably funny at times, becoming a game of spot the allusion. Some of these

moments are so subtle — as when Juliet suggests she would be better off if Gnomeo, a blue gnome, were deformed and immediately takes on the stance of Shakespeare's notoriously disfigured Richard III to emphasize her statement — they blend seamlessly into the story.

The voice talents do not hurt the movie either. James McAvoy and Emily Blunt lead a cast that

includes such notable voices as Michael Caine, Maggie Smith, Stephen Merchant, Patrick Stewart, Julie Walters and Dolly Parton (as her anatomically correct gnome equivalent). Each is most appropriate as their character. The only strange inclusion is that of Ozzy Osbourne voicing the delicate-looking fawn statue in Juliet's yard. Contrary to the theory that such an irony would be funny, the Prince of Darkness' voice coming from a sweet and innocent-looking woodland creature is uneven and a little disturbing.

Unfortunately, the voice actors cannot save this film from its weaknesses. The greatest of these is the absurdity of certain events, as when the gnomes order an earth moving, bulldozer-like computerized lawn mower on the Internet, receive it in the mail an hour later and proceed to destroy the two yards until a massive, mushroom cloud-inducing explosion results. Yes, this is a movie about talking garden gnomes, but this ridiculous plot point is too much to accept. Disney has prided itself on being able to mix magic with the real world in which we live. Things the writers decide to leave as inanimate — like the mower — cannot suddenly take on a mind and voice of their own (the mower is voiced by none other than Hulk Hogan). By doing this, they ruin the illusion and allure of the magic Disney suggests exists around us.

The writers deserve some credit for their original adaptation of a well-known story — however, the idea does not translate into a well-made film. We expect more from animation than the very cartoonish antics we find in "Gnomeo and Juliet."